

Saint Peter's Church,  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Milwaukee Co

HABS No. 28-10

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Photographs  
Written Historical and Descriptive Data.  
District No. 28.

Historic American Buildings Survey.  
Alexander C. Guth, District Officer.  
1249 N. Franklin Place, Milwaukee, Wis.

SAINT PETER'S CHURCH  
2469 North Murray Avenue, Milwaukee  
Milwaukee County, Wisconsin

Owner: Milwaukee Diocese.

Date of Erection: 1839.

Architect and Builder: No record.

Present Condition: Fair.

Number of Stories: One.

Materials of Construction: Wood.

Other Existing Records: See text.

Additional Data: See following pages.

## SAINT PETER'S CHURCH

This little church building adjoins the property of Saint Peter's and Paul's Church on N. Murray and East Bradford Avenues, in the city of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The corner stone indicates St. Peter's was built in 1839.

The history of the church is that of early middle west pioneer days. To understand the "little cathedral's" beginning one must relate something about the early Catholic movement in Milwaukee and the personalities connected with it. The first mass read in Milwaukee was celebrated by Rev. Bernard Schaeffer of Saint Mary's Church, Chicago, on April 20, 1837, at the home of Solomon Juneau, the founder and first settler of Milwaukee. Rev. Schaeffer at that time baptized three children of Solomon Juneau and two other children. In August 1837 Rev. Fleurimont Bondull arrived from Green Bay and at the house of Solomon Juneau celebrated mass. Then followed Rev. Patrick Kelly of Detroit who held services in the Court House. Solomon Juneau persuaded the young Rev. Kelly to take up residence in Milwaukee, create a permanent local Catholic organization, and build a church. Mr. Juneau being a staunch enthusiast generously donated two lots and deeded them to the Detroit diocese, for a plot on which to erect a church. So it is Rev. Kelly, the first resident priest of Milwaukee, who can be credited with the building of Saint Peter's Church. He finished this small frame structure about

two-thirds of its present size in 1839.

In 1841 the second Bishop of Detroit the Rt. Rev. Petor P. Lefevre came to Milwaukee by way of Green Bay, accompanied by Rev. Martin Kundig. On this occasion it was decided that Rev. Kundig leave Detroit and locate at Milwaukee, which he did in the spring of 1842. He enlarged and finished Saint Peter's Church and opened an academy for boys and girls on Jefferson Street near the church. Soon after his arrival a bishopric was to be established in Wisconsin, this territory at that time being under the jurisdiction of the Detroit diocese. Milwaukee and Prairie du Chien (then already an old town) were the competitors for a bishopric diocese and Rev. Kundig can be credited as securing its location for Milwaukee. He staged a grand Catholic celebration on St. Patrick's Day and won for Milwaukee a praiseworthy reputation as a stirring, promising city. Two months later Milwaukee was selected for an Episcopel See. Almost a year later its first Bishop, the Rt. Rev. Henni of Cincinnati arrived, and in 1844 the little frame church of Saint Peter's rightly became Milwaukee's first Cathedral. It served as the first cathedral in this diocese until the cathedral of St. John's was completed in 1853.

In 1874 the Rt. Rev. L. Batz bought St. Peter's Church and in 1899 had it moved to a site immediately to the rear of its present location on Oakland Avenue. It was the Rt. Rev. Batz's desire to preserve Saint Peter's as a historical monument. At a later time a Mr. Peter Schmidt

bought the structure, moved it to its present site and presented it to Archbishop Messmer as a gift to the Milwaukee diocese.

This structure has little claim to architectural distinction. It is of a peculiar mixture of styles. No doubt, the builders felt they had to give the structure a feeling for something of an ecclesiastical nature. Hence the Gothic head windows. The building also represents the type of structure devoted to religious purposes frequently found in Wisconsin. Its salient features such as rectangular plan, modest cupola, pointed window heads and classic type cornice, are typical of the time. It is a true heritage of the past and worthwhile recording.

The little cathedral at present is threatened with destruction. Little ~~is~~ is being done to prevent its decay. However, rumors are abroad that a Catholic women's organization is becoming interested in this little frame church and wishes to augment a movement to provide a fund to be used for preserving it as a historic monument.

*Revised 1936, H.C.F.*

*William C. Butth*  
District Officer.